

International Peace Academy

***From Reaction to Prevention:
Opportunities for the Un System in the New Millennium***

New York, N.Y.

April 13-14, 2000

Moving ahead: Capacities and Initiatives – The role of experts and analysts in contributing to UN capacity to create or capitalize on opportunities to move from reactions to prevention in the new millennium.

In my remarks this morning I will touch on:

- i) What the experts know – or the difficulties of generalization**
- ii) Under what conditions do we have experts and analysts, and**
- iii) Some evidence that someone is listening**

Several important bilateral, multilateral and independent initiatives, including the Carnegie Commission’s ground breaking work on “The Prevention of Deadly Conflict”, have served to draw attention to the

importance and the possibility of creating a “culture of prevention” in the international community.

Despite growing recognition of the differences between structural vs. operational approaches to conflict prevention, we still do not know enough about the structural causes of conflict and how to deal with them. As we have heard, there are heated debates about the causal relations between poverty, inequality and conflict. Similarly, there is controversy about the relationship between democracy and deep-rooted conflict, and at which stage of the democratization process these can be mutually reinforcing. From an international development perspective, we know that development can serve to destabilize societies and create violent conflict as well as to alleviate the sources of conflict. However, we still do not know, with any degree of certainty, which development strategies work best in what type of situations. In short, there is need for intensified efforts to gain a better understanding of the root causes of conflict, and how these manifest themselves in a fast-changing and global international system.

Results of new research and analysis need to be integrally linked to an examination of the adequacy of current policies, instruments and mechanisms to deal with the sources of conflict and/or the need for developing new tools for conflict prevention. For example, the new research on Economic Agendas in Civil Wars had led to the identification of several important policy recommendations.

While there is growing recognition of the need for far-reaching institutional reform to deal with new types of conflicts throughout the world, it is unlikely that the current architecture for international security will be radically changed in the short run. On the other hand, there are promising opportunities for creating innovative strategic arrangements and partnerships among key institutions and an expanding range of new actors (including research institutions, NGOs, regional organizations, etc.) to address emerging needs. Examples: IDEA, War-torn Societies Project, Global Peacebuilding Network, etc.

There are encouraging signs that new technologies (ICTs) might provide a powerful tool for more effective and speedy action in the area of conflict

prevention and peacebuilding, by facilitating information exchange, creating strategic networks, training, and collective analysis.

When we talk of experts and analysts, the considerable global inequities in access to research dollars and, indeed, freedom of expression, become obvious. In too many parts of the world too little has been invested by the countries themselves (and the international community) in their capacity to analyse their own politics. This was an unsurprising corollary of non-democratic régimes.

And so, we have an abundance of writing, discourse and debate among experts and analysts in developed countries. And we all not only enjoy it, but it gives our lives meaning.

Now, in many poor countries, what research there is is funded from the outside. I will not dwell on this point of who the experts are – but want to underline the importance of fora like this happening in all regions of the world – and the importance of the participants in them being producers of the analysis, not just consumers.

How then does the UN make use of all the considered reflection that is available to it? And let us not forget that the UN is a great generation of analysis itself – from the UN Human Development Report to Inge Kaul’s research on Public Goods; the vast work on statistics – including recognition that most of the world’s women don’t turn up in them. But research and reflection and statistical work on the politics of member states, the human rights of member states – which interests us. There, there is real difficulty. Think of the recent positions taken by the developing countries at the UN about the UNDP’s plans for governance.

I was struck yesterday by Elena Martinez’ comment about the difficulties of political reporting, and the difficulties of innovation in information gathering – her example of the 18-20 person network on the Congo and its rather short duration because the Congolese representatives didn’t like it.

However, Mme Martinez referred to the utility of applied research and its easier digestibility for policy makers – and the example of the Wartorn Societies’ Project (IDRC-supported). Now, this example by its very name is further down the continuum than we would like to be -- but its approach, its

methodology should be borrowed, “pre-conflict”. The ‘Wartorn Societies Project’ takes place at the national level in a number of countries.

Yesterday, Sir Jeremy Greenstock said, I summarize, all decision-making is, in effect, national. For experts and analysts to influence international policy, they must influence their national governments, their national delegations.

Governments vary considerably in their permeability, their desire to participate with outsiders to their political process, outsiders to their public service. Canada relaxed its view about this in its campaign on the elimination of landmines, a key contribution to peacebuilding. And while I believe it is true that national policies matter most, national decision-makers must be influenced where you find them – down the street here as well as in capitals.

And so we very much need the “impresarios of ideas” like David Malone, the “policy entrepreneurs” like many of you to connect the reflection to action.

Policy influence is never, anywhere, a straightforward process and, almost invariably, analysis and “expert reflection” is much more effective if it passes through the public to decision-makers. In fact, usually that is the only way it gains credibility. No wonder Gareth Evans was miffed about his newspaper

piece being rejected. If we care about making prevention of conflict the priority then must be stamina for public debate.

As we near the end of this fascinating meeting, we should take heart – the message of prevention, the importance of analysis is well reflected in the spate of publications inspired by the upcoming millennium assembly – including “Altered States” – which I was happy to see many of you picked up yesterday. A product of collaboration between the UN Foundation and IDRC and which puts prevention of deadly conflict as the first of three imperatives of governance (the other two being providing opportunities for the young, and managing climate change). But Gordon Smith and Moisés Naím, authors of “Altered States”, also urge that the Millennial Summit itself do things differently – “that leaders work in small groups for several hours of real discussion”. By then, a companion volume to “Altered States”, entitled “Critical Choices”, that brings together ideas on the importance of policy networks to bring about change will have been distributed. “Millennial discussions” should be about prevention of deadly conflict.

The Secretary General's own impressive document recently released, key for the Summit, reflects the debates analysts and experts have had over the years. He, too, refers hopefully to possible policy networks. It will be important in that, in deepening work on prevention of conflict, the potential to generate analysis all around the world be encouraged, supported, and, indeed, required. And, as important as the analysis, the encouragement (and financing) of the debate that must go along with it. That is why we who discuss in peace and without much requirement for courage should do what we can to make that possible elsewhere. Protection of the defenders of human rights is a relatively new undertaking by the UN – but it is crucial to the extension of the culture of prevention. The defenders of human rights make possible free expression, the space for public debate. Only then can analysts and experts have lasting national influence and hence change perceptions and actions of the member states of the UN.

Maureen O'Neil

Rev. 10 August 2000